
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	820 C Street, SE	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	February 28, 2013	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	12-249	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Applicant “820 C Street SE D. Hall,” with drawings prepared by architect James Phillips of workshop t10, requests concept review for construction of a new rowhouse at 820 C Street, SE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

The parcel at 820 C Street, SE was previously occupied (under different ownership) by a two-story, Italianate rowhouse with a side court leading from the front yard to the rear yard. The property was vacant and neglected, such that structural failure led the DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs to deem it necessary to order the building razed. After the site was cleared, the previous owner sold the land to the current owner.

The parcel is abutted by a two-story frame house with a side court to the west and a two-story masonry house that had been the mate to 820 C to the east. Though the parcel is landlocked at the rear, with a backyard that terminates at the side wall of 237 9th Street, SE, the rear elevation of any construction at 820 C will be readily visible when viewed from 9th Street.

Proposal

The applicants propose to construct a two-story plus basement rowhouse extending the width of the lot. Constructed of brick and including a projecting bay, the design and massing of the house reflect traditional brick bayfronts in the neighborhood. The house would extend 50’ in depth, which is shallower than the depth of 818 C and 3’-10” deeper than 822 C. The height would measure 30’-6”. Consistent with many historic brick bayfront houses, 820 C would feature 1-over-1 wood windows and a brick corbeled cornice. Precast concrete recesses are proposed beneath the windows in the dogleg and on the rear elevation.

The basement would have a separate entry door and stairs on C Street, located under the main steps. The basement includes a window well in front of the bay, a second means of egress in the dogleg, and a window well in the dogleg. The plans indicate that the meter boxes would be placed under the main entry stairs.

Evaluation

This project was initially filed for Board consideration last year. Though the plans were sparse for a number of months, the packet currently submitted for Board review provides enough information to warrant review. The plans have also undergone several helpful changes in the intervening months, such that the result appears to be compatible with the character of the historic district.

The first challenge with this parcel is its width, particularly given the applicants' desire for a projecting bay. Because the historic house included a side court, the vacant parcel is wider (21'-2") than is typical on Capitol Hill. HPO measured all of the historic bayfront houses on this block and found one example of a comparatively wide house at 814 C, though even that house is narrower by a foot or so. In working with the applicants, the scale of building elements became an important consideration in order to avoid the perception that a historicist design had simply been stretched to accommodate a wide lot. As with the historic building at 814 C, the design has been helped by the use of double entry doors, a generously wide front staircase, precast band coursing on the front elevation to break down the massing, and large windows.

The applicants' plans initially featured a "butterfly" roof on the rear ell, in which the roofline sloped up from the middle point of the house and reached a high point on the rear elevation that was somewhat taller than the façade. HPO very recently received proposed rear elevation drawings that showed the house in context with the abutting properties, as well as perspective renderings that were helpful in considering visibility from the intersection of 9th and C Streets and from 9th Street itself. Though the Board has certainly welcomed contemporary design expression in new construction, the scale of the roof form appeared somewhat overwhelming in this particular context. This parcel merits extra sensitivity due to visibility from the public right-of-way and the comparatively modest historic houses on each side. HPO recommended that the applicants use a simpler, lower roof form, which was offered as an option in the plans, and that change has been made in the drawings submitted to the Board. The change is an improvement that allows an already tall and wide house to fit more comfortably into the surrounding context and to become part of the streetscape, rather than the main focus of the block.

As construction drawings are prepared, a few elements should be worked out in consultation with HPO. Details should be developed regarding fencing, paving, and railings and steps, ensuring that the height, materials, and design are consistent with the character of the historic district. A material sample for the brick should also be provided for HPO review prior to permitting.

Though the applicants have commendably planned to locate the meter box in the basement areaway, it is unclear why the area underneath the main entry steps needs to be excavated in addition to the basement areaway itself. Excavation should be as limited as possible, a particularly important principle given that the shallowness of the front yard renders any excavation readily visible from the sidewalk.

Additionally, HPO understands that the applicants are still working on the location of HVAC equipment, which the Board generally requires be out of view. Given the height of the house as compared to the corner property, any rooftop mechanical equipment would likely be visible from

the street. HPO will continue to participate in discussions with the applicants and the neighbors about how best to locate the equipment.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff with the following conditions:

- *The applicants should work with staff to finalize fencing, paving, entry stair design, brick color and texture, meter box location and areaway excavation, and mechanical equipment location.*
- *Concept approval shall not be construed as approval for any necessary zoning relief.*